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THE WEEK IN PERSPECTIVE

U.S. Surprised

Clearly the change in Soviet leadership caught United States officialdom by surprise and President Johnson's first comment on the event underscored this. He said that it "may or may not be a sign of deep turmoil or a sign of changes to come." Then he added this firm but conciliatory note:

"For ourselves, the need is clear—we should keep steady on our goals. Peace is the mission of the American people and we are not about to be deterred. We will be firm and restrained. We can meet any test, but our quest is always for peace."

Yesterday, after a National Security Council meeting, the White House announced that the President would go on television tonight to discuss the Russian shift and Chinese atomic bomb matters with the American people.

The surprise and uncertainty in Washington echoed in West Europe and in other capitals of the world. One widespread reaction could be summed up in the old saying: "Better the devil you know than the one you don't know." And despite Khrushchev's attempt to threaten the United States by sneaking ballistic missiles into Cuba, many Westerners believed him to be sincerely dedicated to the goal of averting nuclear war.

The Brezhnev-Kosygin leader-

ship, however, quickly set about to dispel the uncertainty. Soviet diplomats in a number of capitals abroad advised the governments that there would be no change in the policy of peaceful co-existence and accommodation with the West in the interest of world peace. Ambassador Dobrynin called on Mr. Johnson at the White House on Friday to give him that message. The President met the Soviet envoy after conferring with Secretary of State Rusk, Defense Secretary McNamara, CIA Director John A. McCone and other top national security officials.

Accept Assurances

The tendency on the part of American experts on the Soviet Union—and they would be the first to admit that they really don't know—is to believe that there will be no sharp changes in the Kremlin's policy toward the United States and the West. In other words, they are accepting for now the reassurances given by the new leadership, who are familiar with the fact of our vast superiority in nuclear striking power and economic strength.

As for Soviet internal policy, these "Kremlinologists" see no real reversal of the liberalization trend which marked the Khrushchev era. Certainly, none sees a return to the hard days of Stalin.

It is in the area of Soviet relations with its European satellites and Red China which has Washington puzzled.

Undoubtedly, Soviet control of her satellites was relaxed under Khrushchev, even though he handpicked the leaders of Hungary and Bulgaria. Whether the independence movement, with its consequent look to the West for trade, is too far along for reversal remains to be seen if, indeed, Brezhnev and Kosygin intend to seek it.

As for relations with Peking, there is little reason at this point to believe that the bitter split can be easily repaired. Mao wants to be the acknowledged leader of the Communist world, but no self-respecting Russian is likely to help him toward his goal. The Chinese Communists are proud and arrogant. They have crashed into the nuclear club largely on their own, with only a little Soviet help at the beginning of their program. They claim some of the Soviet Union's Far Eastern territories as their own. And they have often seemed to be trying to maneuver their erstwhile "fraternal" fellow Communists into a war with the United States.

Furthermore, both Brezhnev and Kosygin are on record with bitter blasts at the Mao regime for its anti-Soviet campaign and its stated willingness to risk war with the "imperialists"—translated "United States" in the Chinese lexicon.

As of late yesterday, Peking had not commented officially on the new Soviet leadership, although there were reports that it considers both Brezhnev and Kosygin as "reactionaries."